

# 2006 SESSION Report to the People 21st District

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*From the Desk of Mary Helen Roberts*  
REPRESENTATIVE, 21ST DISTRICT



STATE  
REPRESENTATIVE  
**Mary Helen Roberts**

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**TO: Citizens of the 21st Legislative District**

**FROM: Representative Mary Helen Roberts**

**RE: Challenges in the State**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "MHR".

I hope spring finds you well. As one of your representatives to state government, I am pleased to work hard on the issues that we all care about: great schools and pre-schools for our children, access to affordable health care, and a healthy economy with plenty of job opportunities.

The 2006 Legislative session finished after a hectic 59 days. There was an impressive array of breakthroughs with bills and successes for improving our communities and quality of life. Highlights include the following:

- Students supported through WASL tutoring help and alternative assessments;
- Early learning and child care moved to the forefront;
- Energy independence started by fueling the bio-diesel and ethanol industry in Washington State;
- Compromise reached on the medical-malpractice and patient safety issues;
- Breakthrough agreement on unemployment insurance with better benefits for workers and less cost for businesses;
- Civil rights achieved after 30 years to fight discrimination based on sexual orientation; and
- A long sought agreement to protect the Columbia River while meeting water needs.

I always enjoy hearing from you even if I am sometimes slow to respond. If you are part of a group that would like to discuss legislative issues or wants a speaker, please let me know. I can be reached directly through my District phone – 425-745-9954.

# Successes for Infants, Kids and Families

We all know that children are ready to learn long before they enter kindergarten or even pre-school. We also know parents and family members are infants' best and first teachers. The incredible importance of this earliest period of life has caused the state to move early learning to the forefront.

Although Washington continues to struggle with managing its responsibility to our foster youth, we took action to help them succeed in life. We also made strides toward our goal of assuring that all kids have health care by 2010.

In the 2006 session, we provided for:

- Bringing together the many early learning projects into a newly created Department of Early Learning. This cabinet-level agency will focus on expanding access to pre-school, early learning, early reading and parent education programs while initiating new public - private partnerships;
- Expanding early special education intervention for children with disabilities from birth to three;



- Assisting foster youth move into independence by extending benefits to 50 foster care youth per year as they pursue post-high school education;
- Ensuring health care coverage to about 80,000 more children through additional funding in 2005-06 and by not charging premiums for low-income children on Medicaid; and
- Strengthening child care services by allowing child care providers to participate in collective bargaining with the state.



## Better Health Care Access

Thanks to several reforms I supported, we will have more access to quality health care, increased patient safety and improved long-term care. I voted to:

- Make patient safety a priority, by allowing more open exchanges between health care providers;
- Improve medical malpractice insurance practices;
- Deliver more health care options to part-time workers, children and low-income families; and
- Support long-term care providers for our elderly and people with disabilities.



## Be a 2006 Summer Reader

Summer is coming soon and when school is out, reading 20 minutes or more each day is vital for students to keep up good habits and skills. Children can receive a certificate from Governor Gregoire by participating in the Summer Reading program through their schools or public libraries. Visit the Governor's Summer Reading website to learn more: <http://www.governor.wa.gov/summerreading>

## A Smart Budget

Two dollars saved for every new dollar invested...that's sound budgeting. Our state was fortunate to have a good forecast of a \$1.57 billion fund balance. In the 2006 budget, the Legislature set aside over \$940 million in rainy day savings to cover future costs in education, health care and pensions, plus a left over balance.





## World-Class Education, from kindergarten to college

Because high educational standards mean a brighter future for our young people, we expect a great deal from them. In turn, our students deserve support as they take the WASL and pursue their goals. The class of 2008, this year's sophomores, will be the first class required to pass the WASL to graduate.

I supported several measures to help them succeed, including:

- Providing new funding for after-school programs, summer school and other assistance for students who struggle with the WASL;
- Authorizing alternative assessments for students who fail the WASL after two attempts;
- Expanding a proven mentorship program, Navigation 101, to engage students in creating their path through middle and high school, and;
- Making schools the number one budget priority. The total 2005-07 increase in K-12 education funding is \$1.45 billion, which translates into about \$1,490 per student.

### *Access to College and Job Training*

As a member of the Higher Education Committee, I supported several new opportunities for students who want to move on to college or university after high school, and for young people who want to enter the world of work after high school. The 2006 Legislature's actions included:

- Expanding new baccalaureate degree programs including a partnership between Everett Community College and a four-year university;
- Creating "Opportunity Grants" that provide for tuition, books, and other expenses so that 400 additional low-income high school graduates and/or older adults will obtain the training they need to fill high-demand jobs;
- Opening almost 500 more higher education enrollment places in fields with worker shortages such as nursing, engineering, and biosciences;
- Increasing incentives for more college students to become teachers, especially in math, science and special education;
- Instituting "Running Start for the Trades" apprenticeship opportunities for high school students in order to ease their transition from learning to earning in the construction and building trades; and
- Expanding opportunities for local businesses to contract with community colleges to provide customized workforce training.

## Keeping and Creating Good Family-Wage Jobs

Families and individuals throughout Snohomish County depend on jobs with good wages and benefits. I supported a number of measures to help working families, small businesses and our local employers.

- **Aerospace jobs:** Local businesses who make parts or provide services for aerospace manufacturing will continue to receive incentives to grow and open up new jobs.
- **Unemployment Insurance Reform:** Through an historic and balanced compromise on unemployment insurance reform, workers will get better benefits and employers a fairer system that is both affordable and sustainable. We have restored balance to the unemployment insurance system while addressing the drastic cuts to benefits made in 2003.
- **Tax relief for small businesses:** By repealing the 5 percent penalty for late payment and moving tax due dates from the 20th to 25th day of the month, small businesses will get some much sought relief.
- **Small business personal property tax exemption:** We raised from \$3,000 to \$15,000 the personal property tax exemption for items (office equipment, computers, etc.) owned by small owner-operated businesses.
- **Small Business Health Insurance Partnership:** A new voluntary partnership will blend employer and employee dollars with state assistance to make affordable good health coverage for employers and employees.



## Learn about the Legislature—as it happens!

Young people from 14 to 17 years old can learn about state government and watch it in action when serving as a page. Pages serve for one week at the Legislature, taking classes while they see laws debated and created. To learn more, please contact Judy Jenkins, my Legislative Assistant, or visit the website for the program:

<http://www1.leg.wa.gov/House/PageInternProgram/House+Page+Program.htm>

During the 2006 session, I was proud to sponsor as a page

Diana Rypkema, a sophomore at Edmonds-Woodway High School. I encourage any other young people to take advantage of this great opportunity in the future!



## Success for the Environment

To reduce our dependence on petroleum and imported oil, cut air pollution, and strengthen our farm industry and rural communities, I supported market access to bio-diesel and ethanol, and low-interest loans and grants for bio-fuel energy projects around the state.

I also voted to set up a recycling program for electronic waste to keep old computers, TVs and other obsolete “e-waste” from leaking toxic material into our landfills and water.

Puget Sound will benefit from funding for implementation of plans to fix up failing septic systems in the area.

### **GOOD NEWS! NO MORE DAY-USE FEES AT STATE PARKS**

I voted to eliminate the \$5 fee in all state parks. My colleagues and I are committed to making sure that our parks receive the funding they need to be well maintained into the future. Enjoy the outdoors and the parks that belong to you!

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